

Is “Forward” the Same as “Rock Forward”?

By Kaye West

The same question can be raised in comparing “Back” and “Rock Back” or contrasting “Side” and “Rock Side” or even “Cross” and “Cross Rock.” The answer, if one is looking at a *footprint on the floor*, is that there is little or no difference between the two terms. Therefore, as many descriptions of figures suggest, when a Rock step is intended the cue “Recover” follows the “Forward,” “Back,” or “Side,” and dancers will realize that a Rock step was intended and their next *footprint* will return to its former position.

Since many times figures are described by where the *feet* go (and the timing), many might believe that it should be sufficient to simply add “Recover” following a step in any direction so dancers will realize that a Rock step is intended.

However, when one considers what the *body* does, the terms are decidedly different, and could therefore confuse some dancers. Therefore, when a Rock Step is intended, it is helpful to specify “Rock Forward, Recover,” “Rock Back, Recover,” “Rock Side, Recover,” or “Cross Rock, Recover.”

ANALYZING A FORWARD WALK

To understand the difference, one must consider what goes on in the *body* during a walking step. Typically in round dancing, the emphasis is on the “free foot” or the “free leg.” However, in some contexts the *standing leg/foot* is considered the *dancing leg/foot*. Why? Because the standing leg/hip muscles are the ones which are engaged to move the trunk of the body forward (the free leg does have muscles which allow the knee of that leg to bend, but they cannot propel the body).

Consider what occurs during one walking step. For example, when walking forward with the left leg/foot, the left foot is released from the floor and the left knee bends as the ball of the right foot presses against the floor and the muscles in the *right leg/hip* contract to move the left hip (hence the body) forward. One leg does not move in isolation. Rather, *both legs change position simultaneously*. Some have compared the movement of the legs to be like blades of scissors; they *both* move apart at the same time.

When the left foot initially touches the floor, the right foot for a brief moment still has contact with the floor. Because that is a point which is discernible, that is what should occur when a beat of music is heard; it is the *beginning* of the count (there is space after the beat is heard that is likewise part of that beat). At that point the legs are apart at their widest point. Then the legs *both move simultaneously* (again like blades of scissors) as they come closer together.

Midway through that count in a Forward Walk (whether it is a Quick or a Slow), the previously-standing (right) foot *arrives at the instep* of the (left) foot that “Walked,” and the “Walking” left foot becomes the new standing foot. In musical timing that mid-point is called “and” on a Quick beat, and since a Slow takes two counts, if the beat begins on count one, that midpoint occurs at count two. (While by definition a Walk requires two counts in some rhythms, in others a Walk occurs on a Quick.)

Exactly *how* the feet are positioned is dependent upon characteristics of the rhythm being danced, but what is common in all rhythms is that *midway through the beat* body weight arrives above the leg/hip/foot which “Walked Forward” and the previously-standing foot is without weight next to the foot that “Walked.” The body is positioned to continue movement in the same direction.

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HOW A ROCK IS DIFFERENT FROM A WALK

A Rocking step begins like a Walking step, regardless of whether the direction of the step is Forward, Back, Side, or Across in front or in back. However, it is a “checked walk” that *reverses the direction of movement*. Again, consider what occurs when the direction is Forward with the left foot.

Rock Forward begins exactly like the regular Walk Forward in that both legs move apart simultaneously. However, the previously-standing (right) foot *remains in contact with the floor* until *midway through the beat*; it does *not* move to be adjacent to the instep of the walking foot. Because of that, even when the majority of weight arrives over the (left) leg/hip/foot that “Walked,” there is some residual weight on the opposite (right) foot.

Then on the next beat, the body weight returns to be above the original standing (right) foot and the *left* foot moves to be next to the right foot.

Thus, if one interprets Walk and Rock fully in accordance with what the *body* does, to move “Forward, Recover” with the left foot, one would move the left foot forward and move the right foot midway through the step so that it would be at the instep of the left foot. Then for the Recover, the *right* foot would move again to its original spot. In contrast, in a “Rock Forward, Recover” with the left foot, one would move the left foot forward while keeping the right foot (generally the toe of the foot) in contact with the floor. Then on the Recover the *left* foot would move back, without accepting weight, to be at the instep of the weighted *right* foot.

In other words, in the “Forward, Recover” with the left foot, the *left* foot moves then the *right* foot moves forward and then back, *taking weight*. In “Rock Forward, Recover” the *left* foot moves and then the *left* foot moves back *without taking weight*. That is a considerable difference.